WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 OCTOBER 1989

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S CORNER
COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MAY HAVE FOUND A HOME

The University of Michigan has a house located at 1015 Wall Street that it is willing to give to the Washtenaw County Historical Society. The house must be moved -- or torn down -- in order to make way for a parking lot.

The City of Ann Arbor is willing to work out an arrangement whereby this house, if moved, could be situated on city park property on Main Street at Beakes.

The WCHS has long wanted to establish a museum in order to display and preserve the many artifacts it has been given since 1873. We even have some money in our Museum Fund which would enable us to begin the project.

Is it possible that these events are occurring simultaneously? If you attended the Special General Meeting of the Society on Sunday, September 24, 1989, you are aware that this is indeed the case.

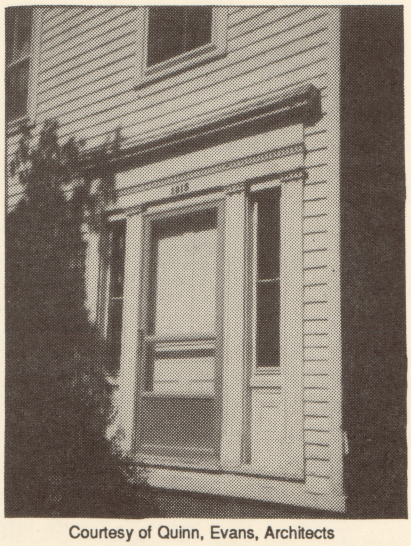
Many details have been explored as we have looked at the possibility of bringing house and site and collections, city, U of M and WCHS together. So many of the details have fallen into place that I have every hope that the remaining unresolved issues can be dealt with satisfactorily.

A major hurdle is timing. The University is anxious to have the house moved, but it will be at least two to three months before the city will have the Main/Beakes site cleared of existing structures, ready to receive the house.

Though we have money to begin, we will need to raise additional funds to complete the project. We want to be able to "do it right," and this will require raising $100,000 to $150,000.

The house, built in the 1830s, is thought to be one of the oldest structures in the city. We have the opportunity to establish a home, to have a place to tell the story of the history of Washtenaw County, and to be able to save a very old building that would otherwise be lost. We need to do it. We need to find satisfactory answers to remaining questions.

Karen O'Neal, 665-2242



Courtesy of Quinn, Evans, Architects

1015 WALL STREET. Built in 1830s.

WCHS HAS OWN PHONE

In a small step to make WCHS more reachable even though it doesn't have a home, the Society has installed its own phone and answering machine at Kempf House Museum, 312 South Division. Our phone number, which will be in the new telephone directories this fall, is 662-9092. Messages left on the machine will be answered.

GSWC TO HEAR MARWIL

Jonathan L. Marwil, author of *A History of Ann Arbor*, 1987, will talk on "Genealogy/History/Images" at the Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County meeting at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, October 22, in Lecture Hall 2, Liberal Arts and Science Building, Washtenaw Community College.

CERTIFICATES OFFERED

Hand-lettered certificates are offered free of charge, framed if desired, by WCHS to organizations for milestone anniversaries. Information: 663-8826. If readers know of such anniversaries coming up, please let us know.

RUSSELL BIDLACK WILL TELL ABOUT FORGOTTEN VIP OF 1844 IN ANN ARBOR

"Andrew Ten Brook, Forgotten Figure in Ann Arbor History," will be Dr. Russell E. Bidlack's topic at the WCHS meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday, October 15, in Bentley Library, 1150 Beal on the UM North Campus near Veteran's Hospital.

Dr. Bidlack, dean-emeritus of the UM library school and a past-president of WCHS, who has shed so much light on Ann Arbor's founders in earlier talks, this time turns the spotlight on an early UM professor and Baptist clergyman.

In 1844, when he came, a man could be both and it didn't seem like a contradiction in terms. The Reverend Ten Brook, Madison College '39, was named professor of moral and intellectual philosophy. He later served as UM librarian and wrote a history of the University published in 1875.

The meeting is open to the public free of charge. Refreshments will be served. Free parking across the street Sundays.

FOUR DIRECTORS NAMED

Four new directors-at-large have been appointed to the WCHS Board of Directors by President Karen O'Neal. They are Marty Evashevski, Dave Pollock and Pam Tabba, all of Ann Arbor, and Marge Hepburn of Chelsea.

Pollock, a WCHS past-president, has had a long and helpful association with the Society. Marge is a past-president of Chelsea Historical Society. Pam served on a historical commission in Brookline, Massachusetts, previously. Marty is a student in historic preservation at Eastern Michigan University.

CHANGE APPROVED

The Society approved a change in the by-laws September 10 allowing the treasurer to issue checks up to $200 without a co-signer to expedite bill paying.

AT WEBSTER CORNERS:

1875 BLACKSMITH/WHEELWRIGHT SHOP RESCUED

A few years ago the Webster Township Historical Society rescued an old blacksmith/wheelwright shop, moving and restoring it at a new site on Webster Church Road just north of Farrell Road, near several other original historic buildings at those corners.

In September, WCHS visited the shop as well as the 1834 Webster Church, the 1871 township hall, and Cottonwood Farm with its modified Greek Revival house where the township was organized in 1833 and named for Daniel Webster, a hero of the time.

Restoration of the 28 foot square two-story shop, topped with a cupola on the hip roof, is an on-going project, Linda Chapman, chairman, said.

"We hope eventually to be able to build buggies here with tools that we have. A lot of tools that you see are not original to the shop and a lot are.

"This shop was located about a mile and a half down the road (north) across North Territorial Road. There's a brick upright and wing style farmhouse on the left. The shop was at the back of that property.

"At most it was used from 1875-1917 -- those are the outside limits. We're not exactly sure. Anytime anyone has any more information to contribute we're happy to have it.

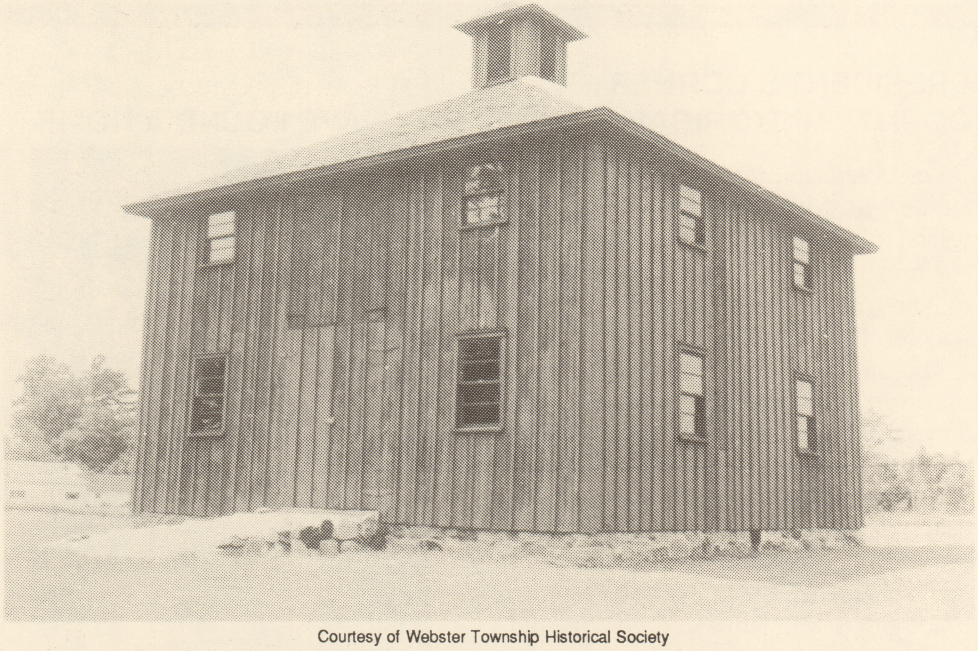
"Tillotson Wheeler, one of the original Webster settlers, owned that farm originally. This was his grandson's shop. The grandson, Victor Jean Wheeler, had to give up using it sometime in the early "teens of this century because of ill health."

He is buried in the cemetery behind the church, near the new basement addition.

He had fixed machinery, buggies, wagons, sleighs and farm equipment in the shop. He also made small items such as hinges, spikes, door latches and horseshoes although he is said to have avoided shoeing horses because he was afraid of them.

A "before" photo showed the shop was a "real mess." The north wall had deteriorated most. A healthy poison ivy shrub was growing up it. The only access was to lift a piece of corrugated metal and crawl inside near the stairs on the north wall.

There were lots of debris and dead creatures. There were raccoons "and we even found some chickens that were just totally fossilized."



Courtesy of Webster Township Historical Society

WHEELER-McMICHAEL BLACKSMITH SHOP
The shop was moved to Webster Corners, Webster Church and Farrell Roads, and is being restored by the township historical society.

"We have come really quite far because the building is now closed in. Now, we're hoping to find some folks who have time and expertise to help us restore some of the machinery."

She showed the five-foot treadle-driven lathe, a workbench and table saw which was originally treadle driven, but when they got it, it had been hooked up to electricity. The saw, originally painted red, had a patent date of October 7, 1873. Those items were given by a man now at Chelsea Methodist Home.

She showed a wheel-rim bender to make buggy wheels. Among the original things are a stock of felloes or fellys (exterior rim of wheels) and spokes stored on the second floor. Two of the half-circle felloes made a wheel. There was also a curved piece for sleigh runners and a wagon wheel hub.

There used to be a shed on the back with a steam engine in it to drive the pulleys that turned the lathe. The story goes that Henry Ford, on one of his buying expeditions, came by and bought the steam engine for Greenfield Village.

The building is stained dark gray on the outside. On the inside, one can see where new boards replaced old. "We haven't made any attempt to disguise what had to be done," she noted.

"When our Amish friends moved the blacksmith shop, they had a crane and they were picking it up with the beams on the upper story. One beam broke in half and a whole wall just fell down."

Otherwise, the beams are original. One of the second story beams was not cut or adzed at all -- "it's just a tree with the bark still on it."

Why did they have Amish? A local housemover told them he didn't think it could be moved intact. She talked to the Amish who had helped with Parker Mill restoration but their price was more than the group they chose. The Amish are experienced with this kind of construction.

The county building code required a three-foot footing "but we still wanted it to look as if it had its original stone foundation."

"Jacob Arthur, sort of the senior member of the group we used, measured the building, came up here with his string and measured where the foundation was supposed to go.

"A cement company poured the concrete and just below the surface they started using the original stone. In one day they did all the stone. Next day they brought the building and set it on there and it fit."

Next stop was the township hall on Gregory Road at the south end of Scully Road where Township Supervisor Don

Zeeb was waiting to tell about township history and the little white frame building still used for township meetings and voting.

A registered state historic site, it is believed to be the sixth oldest township hall in continuous use in Michigan.

Judge Samuel Dexter came to the township in 1824 and built the first house. Two other early settlers were Thomas Alexander and Luther Boyden.

According to the history books, Alexander walked out from Detroit and met the more affluent Boyden who had come on a horse. By a tree where Boyden School came to be, they tossed a coin for who would get the choice plains land. Boyden won the toss and got what came to be Brookwater Farm.

The Boydens lived there for three generations. The first generation built a log house. They had a big barn raising, the first in the locality without hard liquor. The first big building in the community, the barn was used for church and weddings.

Zeeb bought Brookwater Farm in 1960. He and his wife, an Alexander, now live there.

The township was organized in 1833 at John William's farm, on Farrell Road, now Cottonwood Farm, owned by May Mast. The first township hall was built on Scully Road at North Territorial and used until 1871.

A committee was formed April 4, 1870, to petition the state legislature to get money toward a new hall. The township voted a tax 44-3 on April 4, 1871. By December 4 it was ready for the first meeting in it. It cost $1,758.17.

The old hall couldn't have been much of a building, Zeeb thought, because it was sold for $24 for the wood in it. The purchaser tore it down.

They passed a law a couple of years ago that townships don't have to have the traditional annual meetings, but Webster still has them, he said. Everybody is invited. They can set salaries of officials.

Only about a dozen citizens come. "If there's something controversial you might get a whole 25."

"We are up to about 3,400 people. When I came in 1960, I think the population was right around 1,500. A year ago we had 26 building permits. Through July 1989 we've had 41.

The hall is used for township board meetings every third Tuesday, building or zoning board meetings every third Wednesday, Board of Review in March for three days when property owners may appeal tax assessments and for voting.

In times past it has been used for square dances and singing schools, Mrs. Mast said.

When Zeeb first became supervisor in 1974, agricultural property was three fourths of the assessment roll, now it's down to less than one-quarter. "We classify anything under 20 acres as residential -- nobody out here makes a living on anything less than 20 acres."

"The last few years, hardly anybody made a living on more than that," he quipped. "We had a lot of dairy farms, now we have only three. However, we probably have as many horses as we ever had in the township."

Among the early settlers, the Alexanders came from England. They claimed everything was bigger in England -- trees, crops, etc., Zeeb related. They had a big storm here one day and one of the guys from here, of a different nationality, said, "How about it, do you have better lightning over there?"

The Boydens came from Massachusetts. Boyden claimed they cut all their grain there with just scythes, they didn't use cradles. People came with cradles to help cut grain at Brookwater Farm. It soon became apparent that men with cradles could cut much faster. Guys with scythes were put to binding up cut grain instead, he said.

The hall had no furnace until the early 1950s. A suspended ceiling, installed about ten years ago, greatly improved the acoustics, Zeeb said.

He called attention to a patch in the middle of the center aisle floor. Before his time, he said, somebody busted up a couple of chairs and started a fire right there. It burned a hole through the floor and burned up the chairs, then went out.

May Kleinschmidt Mast welcomed visitors to Cottonwood Farm. In her opening remarks, she noted that John Williams came to Webster in about 1826 from the east and took up 1,000 acres. He divided it among four sons. Jeremiah got Cottonwood Farm, another John Williams got where the church is, a third son was on Zeeb Road.

The first John Williams is buried on a hill to the west with his wife and mother. Jeremiah and some other Williams family members are buried in a corner of the Cottonwood Farm yard.

Cottonwood Farm remained in the Williams family for several generations until the great depression. The Masts bought it from the Dexter Bank.

"Do you remember the movie actor, Jeff Daniels, from Chelsea?" she asked. "The first John Williams in Michigan was his great-great-great grandfather."

"We moved here and I started taking kids. A man came from Lansing and said, why don't you start a camp? I had a camp here for 25 years and taught music, crafts and riding. We had as high as 50 horses here, every kid had a horse.

"We fed about 60 people here. I have five houses in a cluster here. We used them for camp and farm vacations and I also served chicken dinners here. I even entertained the London Symphony here."

Williams' former cider storage shed on the corner stood empty for years before it was given to the community and made into a community house, now owned by the church.

Mrs. Mast once taught in the one-room Church School that stood on another of the four corners before it was moved across the road and attached to the church.

Cottonwood Farm house is on the national register and is called modified Greek Revival. And, if you notice, these Williams' were wonderful carpenters. "Look at all the little gingerbread (dentils)."

"They used to hold township meetings and church here at first."

"The house had six bedrooms and two living rooms. It really was a two family house. In those days, people took care of their old people."

She has six grandchildren plus others living on the premises in the extra houses and apartments. One grandson, a carpenter, built a gazebo and a house. Another is a painter and a third, a digger of basements and such.

She then invited the visitors into her antique-filled home, that one person commented was like a museum itself. A red plush settee reminded visitors of a couple similar ones at Kempf House in Ann Arbor which were machine made except for a top center carved decoration.

Mrs. Mast's settee had set in the church balcony for years when she made the best offer for it.

While she has a modern kitchen, she has the original kitchen with a large open hearth fireplace and "a real Dutch oven" in the wall beside it with its own flue. She used a long-handled "peel" to show how you put bread back in or took it out of the oven.

"This is where the early settlers did all their cooking," she said.

The hearth was fully accessorized with the tools of fireplace cooking in-

cluding spiders (frying pans) with legs.

She showed visitors a frilly georgette 1920s dance dress from when she used to "do a lot of dancing" and her high school graduation dress. She then sat down at a piano and played "Country Roads" and some hymns.

Before the group left she showed them her craft house where she works on her larger paintings, reminiscent of Grandma Moses, on crafts or plays piano.

A large painting there is of the Kleinschmidt log cabin on Esch Road in Freedom township. Other of her paintings are in the main house. More noticeable are the outdoor murals that decorate her large barn and craft house.

Because the Society had to have a business meeting, WCHS's Webster visit began with a meeting in the church hall rather than at the blacksmith shop as originally planned.

After the meeting and refreshments, the Rev. John Gardner, pastor, led a tour of the 155 year old church, beginning in its newest addition, the basement church hall.

"I guess we look on ourselves as living history in this place. The church in which we gather on Sunday mornings is 155 years old. (A state historical marker stands in front.)

Five years ago there was no meeting hall underneath the church. John Westerman, a local house-mover and his partner, pulled out the original foundation and literally lifted the church, he said.

Then a bulldozer came in and dug things out, creating the space in which the Society met, he said.

About 35 years ago, the church had moved a former one-room school from directly across the road and attached it to the church for use as a church school.

The Rev. Gardner led the tour through the older basement under the former school and upstairs.

"I was kind of struck by the lady's comment that some of you drove *all* the way out here. Mentally, it's a long way. In fact, we are only ten miles from UM stadium.

"For most of the church's history, people have been coming out here because when the church was built and even now you can see there are still not a lot of neighbors.

"I'm probably the third full time minister of this congregation. It was not until the 1960s that the church employed a full-time staff person.

For a number of years it was a yoked congregation, with Whitmore Lake United Methodist Church for ten years of so. Before that it was yoked to a Congregational Church in Dexter. Prior to that the ministers all came from Ann Arbor or Ypsilanti to lead the worship services.

There are people in the church who attended school in this former one-room school and even people who taught here.

He called attention to several pictures on the wall. When the church celebrated its sesquicentennial in 1984, they commissioned Chelsea Artist Ben Bower to paint the church in watercolors and also depict other church properties -- the parsonage and barns, the community house across the road. The barnes are used for the Webster Recycling Center.

Older photos showed the missionary society, a choral group and the oldest picture of the church itself with the original taller steeple. It was struck by lightning in 1914.

A 1930s watercolor of the church was given the church by a lady who attended a funeral there. Another, an award winning black and white photo, a framed closeup of part of the church front, was given by the photographer in return for the Rev. Gardner performing his wedding ceremony.

Gardner's own personal project was to try to accumulate pictures of some of the 50 ministers who have served the church. He has about 15 so far. Two of the more notable people were Joseph Estabrook and Moses Coit Tyler, he said.

He led the way into the sanctuary of the church he had called "your basic New England style of Congregational meeting house."

"You can see it's a small intimate space, much more of a chapel. I doubt this is as it was originally. The pews were probably in a slightly different configuration, the center door was probably not original.

"By all definitions this is a small church. There are 150 members of all ages, not 150 families. There were 117 people here this morning. You put 100 people in here and it's full."

He said the church draws from Webster township, Dexter, Ann Arbor and even some from Saline, Manchester, Whitmore Lake and Livingston county.

TWO WEBSTER PASTORS MEN OF NOTE: ESTABROOK IN STATE EDUCATION, TYLER IN *WHO'S WHO 1900-01*

While Webster Church was and is a little church out in the country, some of the 50 ministers in its 155-year history achieved a degree of fame beyond having served that church.

Two of the more noted men, referred to by the Rev. John P. Gardner, present pastor, on the tour he conducted of the church for WCHS, were Professors Joseph S. Estabrook (1820-1894) and Moses Coit Tyler (1835-1900).

Estabrook for whom a school is named in Ypsilanti, was "principal" or superintendent of Ypsilanti Public Schools 14 years, beginning in 1853.

He went on to organize East Saginaw Schools, head Ypsilanti Normal School (now Eastern Michigan University), serve as a professor at Olivet College, also University of Michigan regent and acting state superintendent of public instruction. He served Webster Church 1864-1866.

Tyler, a man of many causes and callings, according to *Treasure from Earthen Vessels, the History of Webster Church, 1834-1984*, was the only pastor to make it into *Who's Who in America*, the 1900-1901 edition.

He had become the first recognized professor of American history in the United States, while at Cornell University. Prior to going to Cornell in 1881, he had been professor of rhetoric and English literature at the University of Michigan for a number of years. He served Webster Church 1875-1877.

His causes included temperance, abolitionism, womens' rights and even "musical gymnastics", a kind of forerunner of aerobic dancing. His callings included pastor, teacher, journalist and author. Ordained to the Congregational ministry in 1859, he later was ordained as a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1883 while at Cornell.

LILLIAN BROWN HONORED

A WCHS member was honored last May when the Milan Public Library named its genealogical collection The Lillian Eggert Brown Genealogical Collection and installed a placque to that effect. She was also given a duplicate placque, all in appreciation of her many hours of work for the library and genealogists.

One of her recent projects, with husband Carl and others, was to index Wing's *History of Monroe County*.

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP, 1989-90

(Partial listing. To be continued in next issue. From Ann Arbor unless otherwise noted)

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Chuck & Diane Good
Forrest & Thelma Graves
Ella M. Grenier
Lauretta M. Gribble
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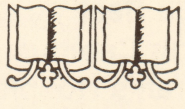

(To be continued.)

HISTORIC MIRROR TO BE GIVEN WCHS

Mrs. Charles A. Sink has notified WCHS that she and her late husband have willed to the Society a large mirror with gilt frame which once belonged to Stephen A. Douglas.

Douglas, a United States senator, was famous for his debates with Abraham Lincoln. He died in Chicago June 3, 1861.

The Sinks were given the mirror by UM Professor and Mrs. Francis W. Kelsey when they moved from their home on Oxford in Ann Arbor. The Kelsey Museum of Ancient and Mediaeval Archeology at 434 South State Street is named for Professor Kelsey who died in 1927.

The Kelsey's had had the mirror 55 years or more. Prior to that it had been in Professor Kelsey's grandparents home in Chicago.

It has been arranged through Ann Duderstadt that when it comes to WCHS, that if WCHS does not have a building to house it, it may hang temporarily in the UM President's house.

'WHAT IS IT' GAME AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS

WCHS offers a traveling exhibit of small artifacts set up as a humorous "What is it" game for children to schools and another for adults.

They are available for classes and meetings, subject to time and volunteer availability. For information call Karen O'Neal, chairwoman, 665-2242.

HISTORIC HAPPENINGS INVOLVE: STORE FRONTS, POSTCARDS, SCHOOLS, FANS

Chelsea Historical Society: 7:30 p.m. second Monday at Railroad Depot, North Main at tracks. To form nominating committee in October.

Dexter Society: 8 p.m. first Thursday at museum, 3443 Inverness. Museum hours 1-3 p.m. Friday, Saturday or by appointment (call 426-2519).

Manchester Society: 7:30 p.m. third Monday at Blacksmith Shop, 324 East Main. Charles Shiver of Tecumseh who specializes in restoring historic store fronts will talk about his work at the October meeting. He is currently doing some work in Manchester.

Milan Society: 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House, 775 County Street.

Northfield Society: Wystan Stevens will give a program on turn-of-the-century postcards of Whitmore Lake at a late October meeting, time and place to be announced.

The grand opening of the Dodge House library at Whitmore Lake was a gala event, Co-president Rusty Towers said. The society, which expects to move into upstairs quarters there soon, had a photo exhibit for the opening.

State Senator Lana Pollack and State Representative Kirk Profit attended as did 36 descendants of the Dodge family from around the U.S.

Pittsfield Society: 2 p.m. first Sunday at township hall, State and Ellsworth Roads. October meeting was to feature a talk by Mrs. Montibeller about Montibeller Park and a visit to a straw and mud house on Michigan Avenue which used to be a stage-stop and post office in the early days.

Salem Society: The Society will carpool to the new state historical complex in Lansing Saturday, October 28. They will examine "The Ghosts of Salem" or their photograph collection at the regular meeting 7:30 p.m. Thursday, October 26, at President Jim Melosh's home.

Saline Society: 7 p.m. third Wednesday, Saline Senior Center, 7605 North Maple Road. October program: Wystan Stevens on Oakwood Cemetery.

Webster Society: 7:45 p.m. second Monday in member homes. Earl Doletzky of Dexter will talk about the consolidation of the Dexter schools November 13. Meeting at 5185 North Zeeb Road.

Ypsilanti Society: Annual craft show at museum, 220 North Huron, changed from October 14 to 21, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Regular museum hours now 2-4 p.m. each Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. Special exhibit of 45 fans from the collection of Mrs. Herbert Cornish this fall. Archives at museum open 9 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday.

Annual fall dinner set Sunday, November 12, at Masonic Temple on Whittaker Road. Program to be announced.

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WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
2:00 p.m. Sunday
October 15, 1989

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